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MEANWHILE, Treblinka had become the great center of extermination. Convoys arrived from all the towns in Poland, from Greece, Bulgaria, and even from Germany.

To stimulate Lalka's zeal his superiors promised him that all of Europe would pour into Treblinka. When he heard the good news Kurt Franz decided to make the camp worthy of its mission. Kiwe's activities were beginning to bear fruit, and since the execution of Langner the number of escapes had diminished even more. The day when they would stop altogether was near. Lalka shifted responsibility for matters of discipline onto the faithful Kiwe and attacked the second part of his program: a reorganization of the work which would give Treblinka the means to carry out its mission.

Ten new gas chambers had already been built to answer the ever-growing needs of extermination, bringing the total number of gas chambers to thirteen. By packing carefully you could get in about two hundred Jews, which theoretically gave a maximum yield of two thousand six hundred Jews every half hour. Of course, this figure was theoretical; it represented the maximum capacity. The actual figure was much lower, for the organization

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was far from perfect. The preparation of the Jews, which had always taken too long, had been slowed down even more by the new requirement of cutting the hair of the women. So it was not the capacity of the camp that was at issue but the organization of the work.

Lalka attacked the problem at its root.

The sixty-car convoys stopped a few hundred yards from Treblinka, where they were divided into three strings of twenty cars each. Obviously, it would have been simpler to send the whole convoy into the camp, but the platform was not long enough, and if the six thousand deportees (about one hundred per cent) got off at the same time, it would cause a confusion, a disorder that might give rise to regrettable incidents. For this reason the Technicians had not deemed it necessary to lengthen the platform, which would not have presented great difficulties, and had preferred the system of rotation. This system avoided a mob, but it slowed down production considerably; each poorly organized debarkation gave rise to unpleasant scenes—uncertainties and confusion for the deportees, who did not know where they were going and were sometimes seized with panic.

So, the first problem was to restore a minimum of hope. Lalka had many faults, but he did not lack a certain creative imagination. After a few days of reflection he hit upon the idea of transforming the platform where the convoys arrived into a false station. He had the ground filled in to the level of the doors of the cars in order to give the appearance of a train platform and to make it easier to get off the trains. Opposite the cars the platform was flanked by a row of barracks where bundles destined for immediate shipping were piled. These barracks, which opened onto the sorting square, faced the platform with a long wooden wall. On this wall Lalka had *trompe-l'oeil* doors and windows painted in gay and pleasing colors. The windows were decorated with

cheerful curtains and framed by green blinds which were just as false as the rest. Each door was given a special name, stenciled at eye level: "Stationmaster," "Toilet," "Infirmary" (a red cross was painted on this door). Lalka carried his concern for detail so far as to have his men paint two doors leading to the waiting rooms, first and second class. The ticket window, which was barred with a horizontal sign reading "Closed," was a little masterpiece with its ledge in false perspective and its grill, painted line for line. Next to the ticket window a large timetable announced the departure times of trains for Warsaw, Bialystok, Wolkowysk, etc. To the left of the barracks two doors were cut into the barbed wire. The first led to the "hospital," bearing a wooden arrow on which "Wolkowysk" was painted. The second led to the place where the Jews were undressed; that arrow said "Bialystok." Lalka also had some flowerbeds designed, which gave the whole area a neat and cheery look.

When all was completed, Lalka came to inspect. The windows were more real than real windows; from ten yards away you could not tell the difference. The arrows were conspicuous and reassuring. The flowers, which were real, made the whole scene resemble a pretty station in a little provincial town. Everything was perfect, and yet something was still lacking: nothing much, a detail, a little touch that would give that stamp of authenticity which cannot be invented. Lalka felt that something was still missing, but he could not decide what. He spent the whole morning on the platform, and at noon when he went to the mess for lunch he was troubled, pensive and preoccupied. Inspiration came with coffee.

"The clock!" he said suddenly, slapping his brow. "Of course, that's it! A station without a clock is not a station."

In front of the other Germans, who were stupefied, he sent for the carpenters. He explained to them what he wanted: a clock face with hands, painted on a wooden cylinder twenty-eight

inches in diameter and eight inches thick. Just as he was getting ready to dismiss them one of the carpenters asked,

"And what time will it be in Treblinka?"

Lalka did not understand immediately and the carpenter explained. "What time will the hands point to?"

Lalka hesitated and then suddenly looked at his watch. It was three o'clock in the afternoon.

"Three o'clock," he said.

Untersturmführer S.S. Kurt Franz had just stopped time in Treblinka.

Hope is fine, but discipline is better. Lalka took a number of other measures designed to accelerate the debarkation of the passengers of death. The blue commando was divided into twenty groups, one to a car; their job was to politely but firmly get the Jews out of the cars and sweep the car floors in exactly five minutes.

When everything was ready Lalka returned and saw that it was good.

The oral tradition of Treblinka has preserved the memory of an episode which is no doubt one of the most terrible and one of the most revealing of what this world of lies and death was like. During the winter of 1943 there arrived in Treblinka the last German Jews, all great war heroes or holders of the highest order of the Iron Cross, from the First World War. Even more than the Polish Jews, they had still refused to accept the reality of extermination. On this subject Ringelblum noted in his journal that the first deportees from the Warsaw ghetto referred to Hitler as *unser Führer*. This terrible blindness lasted to the very threshold of the gas chambers. It was as if the Nazis, in a last gesture of gratitude, wanted to make the circumstances of their death different from that of the other Jews. So, the German Jews were brought to Treblinka not in cattle cars, but in passenger trains with sleeping and

dining cars. Everyone died in the same way, but some were conducted to death like animals and others like middle-class citizens, with a final consideration which points up the madness of the system. The train rolled for a long time through fields and forests, over main lines at first, then over smaller ones. Gradually, grass began to grow between the tracks. But no one was worried; the *Führer* had said that they were going to colonize the great plains of the East. But the train rolled more and more slowly until, grinding from one end to the other, it entered that strange station where the tracks disappeared into a pile of sand. Through the window of the car the passengers saw a charming little station. A few S.S. and Ukrainian guards in uniforms seemed to be on duty. Nothing disturbing so far. The Jews got off, confident. Well, not completely: the men of the blue commando who took their baggage as they got off the train had a peculiar look about them, very hangdog expressions for porters. Fortunately, each one had a number. So in a last reflex of civilized men, the travelers unobtrusively took out scraps of paper and quickly jotted down the numbers of their "porters."

Lalka also decided that better organization could save much time in the operations of undressing and recovery of the baggage. To do this you had only to rationalize the different operations, that is, to organize the undressing like an assembly line. But the rhythm of this assembly line was at the mercy of the sick, the old and the wounded, who, since they were unable to keep the pace, threatened to bog down the operation and make it proceed even more slowly than before. This problem appeared to Lalka just as he conceived the idea of these rationalized stations of the cross. So it was that he came to calibrate the victims. Individuals of both sexes over the age of ten, and children under ten, at a maximum rate of two children per adult, were judged fit to follow the complete circuit, as long as they did not show serious wounds or marked disability. Victims who did not correspond to the norms were to be conducted to the "hospital" by members of the blue

commando and turned over to the Ukrainians for special treatment. A bench was built all around the ditch of the "hospital" so that the victims would fall of their own weight after receiving the bullet in the back of the head. This bench was to be used only when Kurland was swamped with work. On the platform, the door which these victims took was surmounted by the Wolkowysk arrow. In the Sibylline language of Treblinka, "Wolkowysk" meant the bullet in the back of the neck or the injection. "Bialystok" meant the gas chamber.

Beside the "Bialystok" door stood a tall Jew whose role was to shout endlessly, "Large bundles here, large bundles here!" He had been nicknamed "Gröysse Päck." As soon as the victims had gone through, Gröysse Päck and his men from the red commando carried the bundles at a run to the sorting square, where the sorting commandos immediately took possession of them. As soon as they had gone through the door came the order, "Women to the left, men to the right." This moment generally gave rise to painful scenes; to cut short the goodbyes, Lalka doubled the number of Ukrainian guards in this spot.

While the women were being led to the left-hand barracks to undress and go to the hairdresser, the men, who were lined up double file, slowly entered the production line. This production line included five stations. At each of these a group of "reds" shouted at the top of their lungs the name of the piece of clothing that it was in charge of receiving. At the first station the victim handed over his coat and hat. At the second, his jacket. (In exchange, he received a piece of string.) At the third he sat down, took off his shoes, and tied them together with the string he had just received. (Until then the shoes were not tied together in pairs, and since the yield was at least fifteen thousand pairs of shoes per day, they were all lost, since they could not be matched up again.) At the fourth station the victim left his trousers, and at the fifth his shirt and underwear.

After they had been stripped, the victims were conducted, as

they came off the assembly line, to the right-hand barracks and penned in until the women had finished: ladies first. However, a small number chosen from among the most able-bodied, were singled out at the door to carry the clothing to the sorting square. They did this while running naked between two rows of Ukrainian guards. Without stopping once they threw their bundles onto the pile, turned around, and went back for another.

Meanwhile the women had been conducted to the barracks on the left. This barracks was divided into two parts: a dressing room and a beauty salon. "Put your clothes in a pile so you will be able to find them after the shower," they were ordered in the first room. The "beauty salon" was a room furnished with six benches, each of which could seat twenty women at a time. Behind each bench twenty prisoners of the red commando, wearing white tunics and armed with scissors, waited at attention until all the women were seated. Between hair-cutting sessions they sat down on the benches and, under the direction of a *kapo* who was transformed into a conductor, they had to sing old Yiddish melodies.

Lalka, who had insisted on taking personal responsibility for every detail, had perfected the technique of what he called the "Treblinka cut." With five well-placed slashes the whole head of hair was transferred to a sack placed beside each hairdresser for this purpose. It was simple and efficient. How many dramas did this "beauty salon" see? From the very beautiful young woman who wept when her hair was cut off, because she would be ugly, to the mother who grabbed a pair of scissors from one of the "hairdressers" and literally severed a Ukrainian's arm; from the sister who recognized one of the "hairdressers" as her brother to the young girl, Ruth Dorfman, who, suddenly understanding and fighting back her tears, asked whether it was difficult to die and admitted in a small brave voice that she was a little afraid and wished it were all over.

When they had been shorn the women left the "beauty salon" double file. Outside the door, they had to squat in a particular way also specified by Lalka, in order to be intimately searched. Up to this point, doubt had been carefully maintained. Of course, a discriminating eye might have observed that the clock was made of wood and that the smell was the smell of rotting bodies. A thousand details proved that Treblinka was not a transient camp, and some realized this, but the majority had believed in the impossible for too long to begin to doubt at the last moment. The door of the barracks, which opened directly onto the "road to heaven," represented the turning point. Up to here the prisoners had been given a minimum of hope; from here on this policy was abandoned.

This was one of Lalka's great innovations. After what point was it no longer necessary to delude the victims? This detail had been the subject of rather heated controversy among the Technicians. At the Nuremberg trials, Rudolf Höss, Commandant of Auschwitz, criticized Treblinka where, according to him, the victims knew that they were going to be killed. Höss was an advocate of the towel distributed at the door to the gas chamber. He claimed that his system not only avoided disorder, but was more humane, and he was proud of it. But Höss did not invent this "towel technique"; it was in all the manuals, and it was utilized at Treblinka until Lalka's great reform.

Lalka's studies had led to what might be called the "principle of the cutoff." His reasoning was simple: since sooner or later the victims must realize that they were going to be killed, to postpone this moment was only false humanity. The principle "the later the better" did not apply here. Lalka had been led to make an intensive study of this problem upon observing one day completely by chance, that winded victims died much more rapidly than the rest. This discovery had led him to make a clean sweep of accepted principles. Let us follow his industrialist's logic, keeping

well in mind that his great preoccupation was the saving of time. A winded victim dies faster. Hence, a saving of time. The best way to wind a man is to make him run—another saving of time. Thus Lalka arrived at the conclusion that you must make the victims run. A new question had then arisen: at what point must you make the victims run and thus create panic (a further aid to breathlessness)? The question had answered itself: as soon as you have nothing more to make them do. Franz located the exact point, the point of no return: the door of the barracks.

The rest was merely a matter of working out the details. Along the "road to heaven" and in front of the gas chambers he stationed a cordon of guards armed with whips, whose function was to make the victims run, to make them rush into the gas chambers of their own accord in search of refuge. One can see that this system is more daring than the classic system, but one can also see the danger it represents. Suddenly abandoned to their despair, realizing that they no longer had anything to lose, the victims might attack the guards. Lalka was aware of this risk, but he maintained that everything depended on the pace. "It's close work," he said, "but if you maintain a very rapid pace and do not allow a single moment of hesitation, the method is absolutely without danger." There were still further elaborations later on, but from the first day, Lalka had only to pride himself on his innovation: it took no more than three quarters of an hour, by the clock, to put the victims through their last voyage, from the moment the doors of the cattle cars were unbolted to the moment the great trap doors of the gas chambers were opened to take out the bodies. Three quarters of an hour, door to door, compared to an hour and a quarter and sometimes even as much as two hours with the old system; it was a record.

One of these details is interesting to note because it clearly reveals the desire for perfection that drove Lalka. Sometimes you could not fit all the victims in the same string of cars into a single

batch. Although the cars usually contained one hundred heads, they sometimes contained as many as one hundred and fifty, and one hundred and fifty Jews times twenty cars equals three thousand victims for thirteen gas chambers with two hundred places each. Thirteen gas chambers with two hundred places equals two thousand six hundred places: four hundred left over. Under the old system, since the turnover was slow, there was time to make a special batch of this "overflow" of four hundred heads. The extraordinary precision of the machinery introduced by the Lalka reforms had accelerated the turnover to the point where as soon as the gas chambers were emptied and whitewashed with lime, they were filled again, the "overflow" thus joined the following convoy. But the victims "in question," having caught their breath, died less quickly than the others, which made it necessary either to keep everyone in longer, or to "rekill" them as they came out. In both cases this represented a loss of time. To offset this disadvantage, which considerably lowered output, Lalka developed a number of gymnastic exercises—dancing, jumping, and so on—which were to be performed by all the victims who were waiting for the next overload.

But let us return to the men. The timing was worked out so that by the time the last woman had emerged from the left-hand barracks, all the clothes had been transported to the sorting square. The men were immediately taken out of the right-hand barracks and driven after the women into the "road to heaven," which they reached by way of a special side path. By the time they arrived at the gas chambers the toughest, who had begun to run before the others to carry the bundles, were just as winded as the weakest. Everyone died in perfect unison for the greater satisfaction of that great Technician Kurt Franz, the Stakhanovite of extermination.

Since a string of twenty cars arrived at the platform every half hour, the Lalka system made it possible to fully process twelve

trains of twenty cars each—or four convoys, or twenty-four thousand persons—between seven o'clock in the morning and one-fifteen in the afternoon.

The rest of the day was devoted to the sorting of the clothing in Camp Number One and the disposal of the bodies in Camp Number Two.

Transported by two prisoners on litterlike affairs, the bodies, after they were removed from the gas chambers, were carefully stacked, to save room, in immense ditches in horizontal layers, which alternated with layers of sand. In this realm, too, Lalka introduced a number of improvements.

Until the great reform, the "dentists" had extracted gold teeth and bridges from the corpses by rummaging through the big piles that accumulated during the morning in front of the trap doors of the gas chambers. It was not very efficient, as Lalka realized. Thus he got the idea of stationing a line of dentists between the gas chambers and the ditches, a veritable gold filter. As they came abreast of the dentists, the carriers of the bodies, without setting down their litters, would pause long enough for the "dentists" to examine the mouths of the corpses and extract what needed extracting. For a trained "dentist" the operation never required more than a minute. He placed his booty in a basin which another "dentist" came to empty from time to time. After the take had been washed in the well, it was brought to a barracks where other "dentists" sorted, cleaned and classified it.

Meanwhile, the carriers of the bodies resumed their race—all moving from one place to another was done on the double—to the ditch. Here Lalka had made another improvement: previously the body carriers had gone down and stacked their bodies themselves. Lalka, that maniac for specialization, created a commando of body stackers which never left the bottom of the ditch. When they arrived, the carriers heaved their burdens with a prac-

ticed movement, the role of personal initiative being reduced to the minimum, and returned to the trap doors of the gas chambers by a lower route, as on a gymnastic platform, so as not to disturb the upward movement. When all the corpses had been removed from the gas chambers, which was generally between noon and one o'clock, the ramp commando, in charge of removal of the bodies, joined the carrier commando. The burial rites lasted all afternoon and continued even into the night. Lalka had made it a rule that nobody was to go to bed until the last corpse had been stacked in its place.

In Camp Number One the afternoon was devoted to sorting. Here again, there was a new technique: all clothing and all belongings had to be inspected, and any indication that they had belonged to Jews had to be removed. Lalka, still taking his inspiration from the example of industry, decreed that each worker write his registration number on the bundles he made. This measure was designed to make it possible to discover the author of an irregular bundle immediately. The next day, on the advice of Kiwe, the "king of discipline," Kurt Franz opened a bundle at random, pretended to find a Star of David, summoned the culprit, gathered all the prisoners, and had the unfortunate man hanged. The whole incident took a quarter of an hour and put a final touch on the reorganization of the work.

Lalka then returned to problems of discipline. One point preoccupied him: the escapes, although they had diminished considerably, still had not stopped.

"They're still leaking a little," Kiwe had told him.

This was intolerable. It was necessary to put a stop to this scandal at once. But neither promises nor threats had any effect. Lalka found himself faced with a cruel choice: to kill all the prisoners and thus destroy his marvelous organization, or to reinforce the surveillance, to institute systematic searches, to create such a climate of insecurity that the prisoners would no longer

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dare even to dream of escaping. The choice was merely theoretical, Lalka had already made it on the first day: he decided to take all necessary measures to make the camp airtight.

It was on the day after this that Dr. Chorongitski told Galewski that he had finally succeeded in making contact with one of the Ukrainian orderlies, and that the man had agreed to procure weapons for the rebels.

The Committee met at once.

XV

THE *Hofjuden* HAD sensed the exceptional nature of the meeting, and no one was talking in the barracks. Everyone was lying in his bunk with his eyes open, staring at a point beyond the wooden walls, a point outside the camp, outside time itself; a point of felicity where all memory was effaced; a point beyond life and death, beyond personality. It was a point whose contours shifted, becoming successively a house, a feast, a face, a winter day, the sun. The Jews were looking at hope—the hope of living, the hope of dying, the hope of leaving, beginning again, forgetting. Hope for these dead men? But for them everything had become absurd from the day they had arrived in Treblinka. And yet it had begun quite normally: One day trucks had arrived. They had been driven out of their homes, which had been the homes of their parents and grandparents. They knew them well, those homes, they knew every nook and cranny of them, they had crossed their thresholds thousands of times. This time they had crossed them for the last time, but as they did not know it, they had not paid any more attention to them than usual. In the village street a row of trucks waited. The street was deserted and the doors of the houses shut. The Jews were being taken away; it did not concern